

(Mr. Qian Jiadong, China)

I think I would not be exaggerating in saying that we are at a crossroads with regard to outer space: either measures must be taken immediately to stop an arms race in outer space so that it may serve exclusively peaceful purposes for the benefit of mankind, or no measures will be taken at all, and outer space will turn into an arena for the arms race threatening mankind with an unprecedented holocaust. A false step here may lead to major failure. We can by no means take lightly an issue so vitally important to the future of mankind.

This is the third time that the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space has been included in the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. Since as early as the 1960s, the principles and purposes of "non-militarization of outer space" and "the use of outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes" have already been widely accepted by States and enshrined in more than one international legal instrument. Yet, to date, the tendency of expanding the arms race into outer space has not only been unchecked but even increasingly exacerbated. If this issue was not yet crucially urgent a few years ago, now we must say that it has become so urgent that it brooks no delay. It was not by accident that the First Committee of the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session succeeded in combining three draft resolutions and adopted almost by consensus a single resolution requesting the Conference on Disarmament to consider as a priority item the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. This indicates the great importance States have attached to this issue.

The Chinese delegation shares the view underlined by many delegates and by you, Mr. President, that once a weapon comes into being, it will be very difficult to eliminate it from arsenals, and that it is much easier to prevent militarization than to demilitarize. In his statement of 18 April, the distinguished representative of Australia said: "An opportunity lost, or not recognized in time, can be an opportunity lost forever". In China we have a similar saying: "Do not let slip an opportunity, for it may never come again". Ambassador Butler was referring to the elaboration of a convention on a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons. But I feel his words are also relevant to the issue of preventing an arms race in outer space. The question has indeed come to a critical juncture. If we are unable to do anything now, it will be even more difficult for us to do anything in the future. And although the use of outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes has almost become a platitude, we still have to defend it vigorously. We must seize the opportunity before it is too late to make correct decisions, so as to save this common heritage of mankind -- outer space.

In this area, as in many other areas of disarmament, we cannot but emphasize the role of the super-Powers. No one can deny that these two countries, especially their scientists, engineers and technicians have made indelible contributions to the exploration and utilization of outer space. But it is equally undeniable that the same two countries are embarking on a dangerous path in outer space. They are the only two space Powers of today. It is fully justified to ask them to use the scientific achievement which embodies human wisdom and labour only for the benefit of mankind and not to abuse it for military purposes. They bear an unshirkable and special responsibility for preventing an arms race in outer space. In the common interest of mankind, including their own, they should not merely utter words of peace, but fulfil their responsibility by concrete deeds.